

A. A. Palamarchuk, S. E. Fyodorov

PARLIAMENTARY PROTESTATIONS AND POLITICAL CULTURE IN REVOLUTIONARY ENGLAND

There are well-known examples of documents in the history of Great Britain, which have become momentous for the history of nations: these include the English Magna Carta, Scottish Declaration of Arbroath and Irish Statutes of Kilkenny. Their historic significance was not realized at the time of their creation, nor was their crucial role in the process of the formation of ethnic and national communities. The history of the “mythologization” of the Protestation of 1641 spanned a quite short period, but was intense. The creation and recording of the Protestation, its acceptance by Parliament, the King’s reaction to it, and the signing of its English and Welsh versions in provincial parishes as “the national oath” took place between 1641 and 1642. The text was almost immediately raised to the rank of the foundations of the “Godly cause”, and, consequently, to the rank of a key text/event of the Great Rebellion. The book *Covenanting Citizens. The Protestation Oath and Popular Political Culture in the English Revolution* by J. Walter [Walter 2017] is by no means the first study dedicated to the content and existence of the Protestation of 1641. Such renowned British researchers as Ch. Hill, B. Manning, D. Underdown and others formed an extensive tradition of studying the text in the context of political radicalization of the Great Rebellion. On the basis of a wide range of sources — Parliamentary journals and numerous memoirs — the book reconstructs the causes and motives for the initiation of the Protestation (April 1641) and the process of its discussion (3 and 4 May). A comprehensive picture restored by the author of the monograph generally demonstrates that, despite the evident loss of mutual trust between the monarch and members of the House of Commons and the fear of a royal or popish revolt, the Parliament in 1641 acted within traditional framework: the search of a constitutional compromise. Refs 11.

Keywords: Protestation Oath, Covenant, House of Commons, Parliament, Political culture, English Revolution.

For citation: Palamarchuk A. A., Fyodorov S. E. Parliamentary protestations and political culture in revolutionary England. *Vestnik of Saint Petersburg University. History*, 2017, vol. 62, issue 3, pp. 655–660. DOI: 10.21638/11701/spbu02.2017.316

А. А. Паламарчук, С. Е. Федоров

ПАРЛАМЕНТСКИЕ ПРОТЕСТАЦИИ И ПОЛИТИЧЕСКАЯ КУЛЬТУРА В РЕВОЛЮЦИОННОЙ АНГЛИИ

В истории Британии существуют хорошо известные примеры документов, которые бесспорно считаются знаковыми в истории наций: это и английская Великая хартия вольностей, и шотландская Арбротская декларация, и ирландские статуты Килкенни. Впрочем, представления об исторической значимости перечисленных текстов, а тем более об их ключевой роли в процессе складывания этнических и национальных общностей сформировались не в момент

Palamarchuk Anastasia Andreevna — Doctor in History, Senior Lecturer, St. Petersburg State University, 7–9, Universitetskaya nab., St. Petersburg, 199034, Russian Federation; a.palamarchuk@spbu.ru
Fyodorov Sergey Egorovich — Doctor in History, Professor, St. Petersburg State University, 7–9, Universitetskaya nab., St. Petersburg, 199034, Russian Federation; s.fedorov@spbu.ru

Паламарчук Анастасия Андреевна — доктор исторических наук, старший преподаватель, Санкт-Петербургский государственный университет, Российская Федерация, 199034, Санкт-Петербург, Университетская наб., 7–9; a.palamarchuk@spbu.ru

Федоров Сергей Егорович — доктор исторических наук, профессор, Санкт-Петербургский государственный университет, Российская Федерация, 199034, Санкт-Петербург, Университетская наб., 7–9; s.fedorov@spbu.ru

Review written with the support of a grant from the Russian Fund for the Humanities (N 16-01-00108a) “Institutions, Theory and Practice of Western European Monarchies, 16th–18th centuries”.

© Санкт-Петербургский государственный университет, 2017

их создания, а значительно позже. История «мифологизации» Протестации 1641 г. является гораздо менее протяженной во времени и гораздо более интенсивной. Ее разработка и написание, принятие парламентом, реакция короля и подписание документа в английских и валлийских провинциальных приходах в качестве «национальной клятвы» разворачивались в 1641–1642 гг.; почти сразу же этот текст представителями радикального пресвитерианского крыла был возведен в ранг фундаментальных основ «*Godly cause*» и соответственно в ранг ключевого текста/события Великого мятежа. Книга Дж. Уолтера «Граждане, заключившие ковенант: клятва протестации и народная политическая культура Английской революции» — отнюдь не первое исследование, посвященное содержанию и бытованию Протестации 1641 г. Видные британские исследователи К. Хилл, Б. Мэннинг, Д. Андердаун и др. сформировали обширную традицию изучения ее текста в контексте политической радикализации Великого мятежа. На основе практически всех имеющихся источников — парламентских журналов и многочисленных мемуаров — в книге реконструированы причины инициирования Протестации (апрель 1641) и процесс ее обсуждения (3–4 мая). Воссозданная автором многогранная картина показывает, что, несмотря на очевидную утрату взаимного доверия между монархом и депутатами нижней палаты, страх роялистского или папистского переворота, в 1641 г. парламент действовал в рамках вполне традиционной парадигмы — поиска конституционного компромисса. Библиогр. 11 назв.

Ключевые слова: Протестация, ковенант, Палата общин, парламент, политическая культура, Английская революция.

There are well-known examples of documents in the history of Great Britain, which have become momentous for the history of nations: these include the English Magna Carta, Scottish Declaration of Arbroath [Fyodorov, Palamarchuk 2015, pp. 176–178] and Irish Statutes of Kilkenny. Their historic significance was not realized at the time of their creation, nor was their crucial role in the process of the formation of ethnic and national communities.

The history of the Great Charter of Liberties of 1215 is extremely indicative in this regard. Traditional as far as its format was concerned (“charters of liberties” listing privileges and “liberties” of nobility were issued upon a new monarch’s ascension to the throne), originally this document was created as a result of the divide between political elites and was a formal confirmation of the compromise between the Crown and nobility. When the Plantagenets had managed to consolidate feudal elites by different means, including the emerging institution of Parliament, the text of the Great Charter soon lost its relevance, and was mentioned in Parliamentary statutes and other legal documents merely occasionally. It was only in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, when a new concept of the so-called “ancient constitution” was formed within the English judicial community, that the text of 1215 was reconsidered, published and added to the essentials of the English law. In the light of this, during the reign of James I Stuart, and especially at the time of his successor, Charles I, the text of the Charter started to be used as a valid argument in political disputes — both in the Parliament itself and in political essays, and Magna Carta became a symbol of “ancient liberties” and the struggle against tyranny [Fyodorov 2007; Fyodorov 2016, pp. 62–72].

The history of the “mythologization” of the Protestation of 1641 spanned a less lengthy period, but was more intense. The creation and recording of the Protestation, its acceptance by the Parliament, the King’s reaction to it and signing of the document in English and Welsh provincial parishes as “the national oath” took place between 1641 and 1642. Almost immediately the text was raised to the rank of the foundations of the “*Godly cause*”, and, consequently, to the rank of a key text/event of the Great Rebellion.

Walter's book is by no means the first study dedicated to the content and existence of the 1641 Protestation. Such renowned British researchers as Christopher Hill [Hill 1997], Brian Manning [Manning 1976] and David Underdown [Underdown 1985, Underdown 1996] formed an extensive tradition of studying the text in the context of political radicalization of the Great Rebellion. In the introduction of the monograph, the author deals with the historiography in detail and also sets his own goal: combining the data of political and cultural history to examine the Protestation "as a manifesto for, and example of, an integrated history of pre-Revolutionary early modern politics" [Walter 2017, p. 4].

On the basis of a wide range of sources — Parliamentary journals and numerous memoirs — the first chapter of the book, "Parliamentary politics and the Making of the Protestation", reconstructs the causes and the motive for the initiation of the Protestation (April 1641) and the process of its discussion (3–4 May). A comprehensive picture restored by the author of the monograph generally demonstrates that, despite the evident loss of mutual trust between the monarch and members of the House of Commons and the fear of a royal or popish revolt, the Parliament in 1641 acted within the traditional framework, namely the search for a constitutional compromise.

The making of the document, which was later called "The Protestation", was deemed as the materialization of the legitimate mechanism that allowed demands put forward by the opposition to be included in the concept of the "ancient constitution". The preliminary debate in the Lower House illustrates that the aim of most commoners was to create a document which could become both an oath of association and an oath of loyalty between the Parliament and the king. However, the representatives of the radical Presbyterian wing, the "godly cause", proposed an completely different concept. In their view, the text was to be approved as the national covenant (modeled on the Scottish Covenant of 1638). This aspect of the Protestation (noted by contemporaries at once) transformed the perspective of the interpretation of the document from a merely constitutional to a religious one.

The second chapter of the book — "Popular politics and the Making of the Protestation" — is most crucial methodologically as it reconstructs the mechanism of the primary social response to the document, to be precise the spread of the information about the text of the Protestation and the parliamentary debates among preachers and politically active elites in London.

The stage of such "primary reception" (during which, according to the author, the Protestation, like any other similar text, acquires its main social significance) often escapes attention of Early Modern researchers owing to the lack of surviving sources. Yet so far as the events of the middle of the 17th century are concerned, such sources, mostly memoirs, are in abundance.

The reconstruction of the concrete means of informal interaction between commoners, representatives of the City and anti-Catholic London preachers, enables one to understand how in a matter of days the idea of a national oath, which would not only ensure the protection of Parliament but also legitimize its actions irrespective of the position of the Crown, originated and took shape in the minds of commoners.

The issues of creating a "new legitimacy" determined by the Parliament, not stemming from the king, but initiated by the authority of the representative body are dealt with in chapter 3, "Debating the Protestation".

The text of the Protestation, being purely traditional and containing formulae characteristic of monarchical discourse about protection of the "Protestant Church, king, Parlia-

ment, and individual liberties” [Walter 2017, p. 80], became the subject-matter of numerous interpretations in sermons and pamphlets now addressed not to Londoners, but to a provincial audience. Presbyterian preachers interpreted the words about the protection of Protestantism in line with the idea of the national covenant aired in the Parliament during the first days. The legitimacy of such a Covenant, aimed at protection of the true religion from “lies and corruption” as well as the legitimacy of further actions of its participants, no longer depended on its approval or rejection on the part of the sovereign. The history of Biblical covenants (covenants between God and Noah, God and Abraham, God and Moses, and, finally, the New Covenant in the blood of Christ) served as a prologue to the “covenants” of the Great Charter, the Scottish Covenant of 1580–8, 1638, and, most importantly, to the Protestation. Thus, Constitutional acts gained a religious connotation and political collisions began to be perceived in terms of religious truth and lies [Vallance 2005].

The fourth chapter, “Administering the Protestation”, explores the process of signing the Protestation in London and in English provinces during the spring-summer of 1641. By the end of summer, the Protestation had been signed by no fewer than 200 towns and boroughs, not counting London parishes. The process of signing (proclaimed free of coercion) was entrusted to parish priests. The parish itself served as the main administrative unit, determining the interaction between the Parliament and the province. Moreover, the author shows to which extent the acceptance of the Protestation, the adherence and the timeliness of carrying out its signing, depended on the authority of the local priest, the personal influence of the deputy from the county, the existence and popularity of Presbyterian attitudes in the parish, and other conditions. J. Walter convincingly proves that local policy, as was the case in earlier periods, was mostly determined by local clientship and did not have any features of “national” unification. Only in 1642 did sheriffs of pro-parliamentary counties get involved in the coordination of signing the Protestation; concurrently the signing of the oath ran into spontaneous resistance.

In the fifth chapter “Taking the Protestation” the author shows how, thanks to signing of the Protestation, the Parliament put pressure on local administration, mostly sheriffs and justices of the peace. The representatives of land-holding elites, as a rule, were excluded from the process of organizing the signatures.

The fact that signing the oath took place in parishes to some extent effected a religious perception of the “covenant”, whereas the involvement of secular administration in the process of signing had to confirm its constitutional significance. Of special importance was a parliamentary requirement concerning the signing of the Protestation by members of corporations: the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, as well as Inns of Court, which had traditionally assumed the role of experts and keepers of the “ancient constitution” [Palamarchuk 2015, pp. 291–295]. Therefore, the province was swaying between two interpretations of the Protestation: the Presbyterian theological context of “the covenant” and in a more traditional context of a constitutional oath.

The sixth chapter, “Performing the Protestation”, unfolds a most fascinating aspect of acceptance of the Protestation within the context of the European medieval culture of oath-taking. In the culture of the classical Middle Ages the oath (oath of allegiance, oath of innocence, exchanges of bargain promises) was taken orally; such oral oaths served as binding documents and did not require any written verification. The interpretation of the Protestation as Covenant enhanced its binding authority to a larger extent, as one of

the parties of the agreement was God. The Protestation was to provide not only vertical, but also horizontal ties. These lay between members of the local community, who had signed it, and the Parliament, which initiated the process of signing. J. Walter claims that such transformation of the attitude to the oath posed a challenge to provincial patriarchal culture (with a patriarchal household as its foundation) and was an attempt on the part of commoners to build a new “political nation”.

The debatable conclusion “Covenanting Citizens, Enacting a Nation” reflects on the ambiguity in the content of the Protestation and its perception. The author endeavors to explain which phenomena and tendencies in English society aggravated or stimulated a complex process of acceptance of the text of the oath by pro-parliamentary counties. Yet the conclusion, whose role is to summarize the exceptionally diverse and rich material of the research, leaves the audience with more questions than answers.

For example, while discussing the success of the Protestation in integrating supporters of the Parliament, the author puts forward two contradictory explanations. According to the first, the Parliament mobilized characteristically medieval perceptions deeply inherent in the public mind (especially as far as the English province was concerned) about popular representation in the government, where “participation and political consciousness extended deep down into the social structure” [Walter 2017, p. 260].

The second explanation proposed by the author concerns the consequences of shaping a new political culture during the process of signing the Protestation, which albeit not purposefully, was created by the Parliament. This political culture, as J. Walter assumes, gradually dissolved numerous patriarchal communities and formed a relatively unified “national” space.

It is hardly possible to take issue with the first explanation; however, attempts at discovering the origins of “the national” in the events of the Civil war raise serious objections. It is not only that patriarchal structures (determining the essence and format of social interaction within a local community) both at the level of counties and certain manors proved to be far more stable than they might seem. It is the idea of the covenant, essentially religious by definition and present in the religious and political discourse of the era of the Revolution, that prevented the formation of “the national” [Palamarchuk 2012, pp. 60–67]. A religious covenant, presupposed as a unique, unbreakable and personal agreement with God, was incompatible with a network of attachments and cultural and historical associations entwined in “the national” as it was understood by contemporaries. Therefore, as we see now, the process of “Covenanting the people” did not only fail to stimulate the formation of an “English nation” with its origins rooted in the Early Stuart period, but served in fact to hinder it.

References

- Fyodorov S. E., Palamarchuk A. A. *Srednevekovaia Shotlandiia*. St. Petersburg, Dmitry Bulanin Publ., 2014, 352 p. (In Russian)
- Fyodorov S. E. *Antikvarnoe istoriopisanie: Istoria I sovremennost v iakovitskoi Anglii*. The Handbook. St. Petersburg, St. Peterburgskog University Press, 2007, 42 p. (In Russian)
- Fyodorov S. E. Velikaia Chartia Volnostei: Context i scenario posleduiuchego vospriiatiia. *Srednie veka*, 2016, volume 77, no. 1–2, pp. 62–72. (In Russian)
- Hill Ch. *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England*. New York, St. Martin's Press, 1997, 464 p.
- Manning B. *The English People and the English Revolution, 1640–1649*. London, Heinemann, 1976, 390 p.

- Palamarchuk A. *Tsyvilnoe parvo v rannestuartowskoi Anglii: instituty i idei*. St. Petersburg, Aletea Publ., 2015, 321 p. (In Russian)
- Palamarchuk A. Tsivilisty v rannestuartowskoj Anglii: juridicheskaja korporatsyja w poiskah natsionalnoj idei. *Vestnik of Saint-Peterburg University*. Series 2. 2012, no. 4, pp. 60–67. (In Russian)
- Underdown D. *Revel, Riot and Rebellion: Popular Politics and Culture in England 1603–1660*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1985, 352 p.
- Underdown D. *A Freeborn People: Politics and the Nation in Seventeenth-Century England*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996, 192 p.
- Vallance Ed. *Revolutionary England and the National Covenant: State Oath, Protestantism and the Political Nation, 1553–1682*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005, 262 p.
- Walter J. *Covenanting Citizens. The Protestation Oath and Popular Political Culture in the English Revolution*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2017, 277 p.

Received: 03.05.2017

Accepted: 10.08.2017